



Biden orders more Intel investigation of COVID-19 origin

By ZEKE MILLER and
AAMER MADHANI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday ordered U.S. intelligence officials to “re-double” their efforts to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, including any possibility the trail might lead to a Chinese laboratory. After months of minimizing that possibility as a fringe theory, the Biden administration is joining worldwide pressure for China to be more open about the outbreak, aiming to head off GOP complaints the president has not been tough enough as well as to use the opportunity to press China on alleged obstruction.

Biden asked U.S. intelligence agencies to report back within 90 days. He directed U.S. national laboratories to assist with the investigation and the intelligence community to prepare a list of specific queries for the Chinese government. He called on China to cooperate with international probes into the origins of the pandemic. Republicans, including former President Donald Trump, have promoted the theory that the virus emerged from a laboratory accident rather than naturally through human contact with an infected animal in Wuhan, China.

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Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and Diana Bianchi, director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, speak after a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee looking into the budget estimates for National Institute of Health (NIH) and the state of medical research, Wednesday, May 26, 2021, on Capitol Hill in Washington.

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Biden in a statement said the majority of the intelligence community had “coalesced” around those two scenarios but “do not believe there is sufficient information to assess one to be more likely than the other.” He revealed that two agencies lean toward the animal link and “one leans more toward” the lab theory, “each with low or moderate confidence.”

“The United States will also keep working with like-minded partners around the world to press China to participate in a full, transparent, evidence-based international investigation and to provide access to all relevant data and evidence,” said Biden.

His statement came after weeks of the administration endeavoring to avoid public discussion of the lab leak theory and privately suggesting it was farfetched. In another sign of shifting attitudes, the Senate approved two Wuhan lab-related amendments without opposition, attaching them to a largely unrelated bill to increase U.S. investments in innovation. One of the amendments, from Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., would block U.S. funding of Chinese “gain of function” re-



In this May 13, 2021 file photo, President Joe Biden speaks in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington. Biden is asking U.S. intelligence agencies to “redouble” their efforts to investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

search on enhancing the severity or transmissibility of a virus. Paul has been critical of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government’s top infectious-disease expert, and aggressively questioned him at a recent Senate hearing over the work in China. The other amendment was from GOP Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa and it would prevent any funding to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Both were approved without roll call votes as part of the broader bill that is still under debate in the Senate. As for the

origin of pandemic, Fauci, a White House coronavirus adviser, said Wednesday that he and most others in the scientific community “believe that the most likely scenario is that this was a natural occurrence, but no one knows that 100 percent for sure.” “And since there’s a lot of concern, a lot of speculation and since no one absolutely knows that, I believe we do need the kind of investigation where there’s open transparency and all the information that’s available, to be made available, to

scrutinize,” Fauci said at a Senate hearing.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that the White House supports a new World Health Organization investigation in China, but she added that an effective probe “would require China finally stepping up and allowing access needed to determine the origins.”

Biden still held out the possibility that a firm conclusion may never be reached, given the Chinese government’s refusal to fully cooperate with international

investigations.

“The failure to get our inspectors on the ground in those early months will always hamper any investigation into the origin of COVID-19,” he said.

Administration officials continue to harbor strong doubts about the lab leak theory. Rather, they view China’s refusal to cooperate in the investigation — particularly on something of such magnitude — as emblematic of other irresponsible actions on the world stage.

Privately, administration officials say the end result, if ever known, won’t change anything, but note China’s stonewalling is now on display for the world to see.

The State Department, which ended one Trump-era probe into the Chinese lab theory this spring, said it was continuing to cooperate with other government agencies and pressed China to cooperate with the world.

“China’s position that their part in this investigation is complete is disappointing and at odds with the rest of the international community that is working collaboratively across the board to bring an end to this pandemic and improve global health security,” said spokesman Ned Price. □

Karine Jean-Pierre makes history giving White House briefing



White House deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre speaks during a press briefing at the White House, Wednesday, May 26, 2021, in Washington.

By **ALEXANDRA JAFFE**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Karine Jean-Pierre on Wednesday became the first open-

Associated Press

ly gay woman to deliver the White House press briefing and only the second Black woman in history to take on the role.

Jean-Pierre, the White House principal deputy press secretary, had briefed reporters aboard Air Force One, but Wednesday marked her first time before the lectern for a televised briefing. “It’s a real honor to be standing here today,” Jean-Pierre told reporters, when asked about her historic turn. “Clearly the president believes that representation matters, and I appreciate him giving me this opportunity.”

Judy Smith, who served as deputy press secretary to President George H.W. Bush in 1991, was the first Black woman to take on the role. Jean-Pierre is seen as a potential successor to current White House

press secretary Jen Psaki, who has publicly said she only intends to serve in the role for about a year, and Wednesday’s appearance was seen as an audition of sorts for the job. Jean-Pierre fields press requests and makes frequent appearances for the Biden administration on cable news.

“Today is a big day in the press office and @WhiteHouse. My partner in truth--@KJP46 is doing her first full briefing from the podium today making history in her own right. But doing her real justice means also recognizing her talent, her brilliance and her wonderful spirit,” Psaki tweeted.

On Wednesday, like Psaki and generations of White

House spokespeople before her, Jean-Pierre leaned heavily on a binder full of prepared notes and statements, as she fielded questions on topics including the Tokyo Olympics and the origins of the coronavirus pandemic. Jean-Pierre, who was born in Martinique to Haitian emigrants and grew up in New York City, has spoken publicly about how her own experiences as an immigrant have informed her lengthy career in politics. “I am everything that Donald Trump hates,” she said in a video for progressive organization MoveOn in 2018. “I’m a Black woman, I’m gay, I am a mom. Both my parents were born in Haiti.” □

California and U.S. agree to allow big offshore wind farms

By BRIAN MELLEY

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California and the U.S. government announced Tuesday to open up areas off the state's central and northern coasts to the first commercial wind energy farms on the Pacific Coast.

The pact that would float hundreds of turbines off the coast of Morro Bay and Humboldt Bay was touted as a breakthrough to eventually power 1.6 million homes and help the state and federal government reach ambitious climate change goals through clean energy production.

"California, as we all know, has a world class offshore wind resource, and it can play a major role in helping to accelerate California's and the nation's transition to clean energy," National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy said.

The plan includes floating 380 windmills across a nearly 400-square-mile (1,035-square-kilometer) expanse of sea 20 miles (32 kilometers) northwest of Morro Bay. The site could be finalized next month and could be put up for lease next year.

The announcement is part of President Joe Biden's plan to create 30 gigawatts of offshore wind energy by 2030. The new projects



In this June 28, 2006 file photo windmills are seen, near Livermore, Calif.

— if approved and built — would provide a major expansion of offshore wind power in the U.S. Currently, there are just two working offshore wind farms — off Block Island in Rhode Island and off Virginia — but more than two dozen others are in development.

The projects will require several stages of approval — from an early review by the Coastal Commission to federal and state environmental reviews after a lease sale, said Sandy Louey of the California Energy Commission.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, said he included \$20 million in his revised

budget proposal this month that would help expedite environmental review of the projects.

"We value process but not the paralysis of a process that takes years and years and years that can be done in a much more focused way," Newsom said. Environmental groups — including Audubon and the Natural Resources Defense Council — issued statements in support of the project with the caveat that fish, seabirds and marine mammals are protected.

The Environmental Defense Center, which was founded in Santa Barbara after a massive offshore oil spill

in 1969, echoed that sentiment, calling for minimal harm to species and coastal communities.

"We must remain vigilant in our efforts to ensure offshore wind is a net positive for California by also implementing robust environmental protections," Kristen Hislop said in a statement. Fishermen, however, are concerned that construction and operation of projects on this scale could disrupt the ecosystem and that they were not consulted on the impact the locations could have on their industry.

"We feel we've not been invited to have a seat at

the table. We feel we're on the menu," said Mike Conroy, executive director of The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations. The area off Morro Bay is a fishery for tuna and sword fish and he's concerned that the floating turbines could change migratory patterns of whales and other species. If blue and humpback whales, for example, are forced closer to shore, it could bring closures of Dungeness crab fishing.

The areas were chosen by agreement with the state, the Department of Interior, which oversees the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and the Department of Defense, which conducts training and weapons testing off the coast.

The agreement comes two weeks after the Biden administration announced a \$3 billion project off the coast of Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts that would power 400,000 homes with 84 turbines. The 800-megawatt Vineyard Wind project would be the first utility-scale wind power development in federal waters.

Another proposed project, Ocean Wind, off New Jersey would create 1,100-megawatts of power. Those wind farms would be dwarfed by the scale of the California projects. □

Associated Press

U.S. allows Americans with expired passports to return home

By MATTHEW LEE

AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration says many American citizens holding recently expired U.S. passports will be allowed to return home from abroad on that document until the end of year.

Citing delays in passport renewals caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the State Department said certain passports that expired on or after Jan. 1, 2020, will be honored for reentry into the United States until Dec. 31, 2021. That's because the pandemic forced the depart-

ment and most embassies and consulates to close down or significantly reduce passport services.

"U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers will accept for admission certain expired U.S. passports, thereby assisting U.S. citizens who have been affected by appointment backlogs at embassies and consulates overseas caused by the COVID-19 pandemic," the department said in a notice issued late Monday.

The closures resulted in waiting times of more than two months in some cases for processing passport re-

newals, and a significant backlog of applications remains. The department cautioned, though, that recently expired passports aren't valid for international travel from the United States or for travel between third countries that is not directly linked to return travel to the U.S.

"Recently expired passports cannot be used to travel from the United States to an international destination or to travel to a foreign country for any length of stay longer than an airport connection en route to the United States or to a United States ter-



This May 25, 2021 photo shows a U.S. Passport cover in Washington.

Associated Press

ritory," the department said. □

8 dead in shooting at rail yard serving Silicon Valley

By **JOCELYN GECKER** and **TERENCE CHEA**

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) —

An employee opened fire Wednesday at a California rail yard serving Silicon Valley, killing eight people before ending his own life, authorities said.

The suspect was an employee of the Valley Transportation Authority, which provides bus, light rail and other transit services throughout Santa Clara County, the most populated county in the Bay Area, authorities said.

The attacker was identified as 57-year-old Sam Cassidy, according to two law enforcement officials. Investigators offered no immediate word on a possible motive.

The shooting took place around 6:30 a.m. at a light rail facility that includes a transit-control center, parking for trains and a maintenance yard.

Sheriff's spokesman Deputy Russell Davis said the attack also resulted in "multiple major injuries." He did not know the type of weapon used. He said the victims included VTA employees. Authorities did not release any of the victims' names. "These folks were heroes during COVID-19. The buses never stopped running, VTA didn't stop running. They just kept at work, and now we're really calling on them to be heroes a second time to survive such a



Law enforcement officers respond to the scene of a shooting at a Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) facility on Wednesday, May 26, 2021, in San Jose, Calif.

Associated Press

terrible, terrible tragedy," Santa Clara County Supervisor Cindy Chavez.

Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen said it was his understanding the shooting happened inside the VTA building during a morning meeting.

Victims' grief-stricken families sat huddled together, holding hands and crying, after learning they had lost a loved one, Rosen told reporters, describing the scene inside a county building.

"They're just sitting and holding hands and crying," Rosen said. "It's terrible. It's awful. It's raw. People are learning they lost their husband, their son, their brother." He said about 100 people

were inside the family reunification center.

Police vehicles and orange crime-scene tape blocked off the area, and reporters were kept at a distance. The rail yard is in the city's administrative neighborhood, near the sheriff's office and city and county offices.

Bomb squads were searching the rail complex after receiving information about possible explosive devices inside the building, Davis said.

Officials were also investigating a house fire that broke out shortly before the shooting, Davis said. Public records show Cassidy owned a two-story home where firefighters responded

Wednesday morning.

Cassidy had worked for the VTA since at least 2012, according to the public payroll and pension database known as Transparent California. His position from 2012 to 2014 was listed as a mechanic. After that, he was a substation maintainer, the records said.

VTA trains were already out on morning runs when the shooting occurred. Light rail service was to be suspended at noon and replaced with bus bridges, agency Chairman Glenn Hendricks told a news conference.

"It's just very difficult for everyone to be able to try to wrap their heads around and understand what has happened," Hendricks

said.

Outside the scene, Michael Hawkins told The Mercury News that he was waiting for his mother, Rochelle Hawkins, who had called him from a co-worker's phone to assure him that she was safe.

When the shooting started, "she got down with the rest of her coworkers" and dropped her cell phone, Michael Hawkins told the newspaper. Rochelle Hawkins did not see the shooter, and she was not sure how close she had been to the attacker, her son said.

The bloodshed comes in a year that has seen a sharp increase in mass killings as the nation emerges from pandemic restrictions that closed many public places and kept people confined to their homes.

A database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University that tracks every mass killing over the last 15 years shows that the San Jose attack is the 15th mass killing so far in 2021, all of them shootings.

Eighty-six people have died in the shootings, compared with 106 for all of 2020. It is the sixth mass killing in a public place in 2021. The database defines mass killings as four people dead, not including the shooter, meaning the overall toll of gun violence is much higher when adding in smaller incidents. □



This computer rendering provided by Mass Design Group, shows a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, a 20-foot-high (6-meter-high) bronze sculpture called "The Embrace", planned for the Boston Common in Boston.

Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott

King planned for the Boston Common has received unanimous approval from

Boston's MLK memorial cleared by city Landmarks Commission

a city panel, allowing construction to start, the group behind the memorial said Wednesday.

The 20-foot-high (6-meter-high) bronze sculpture called "The Embrace" will be one of the country's largest memorials dedicated to racial equity when installation is complete in October 2022, the privately-funded King Boston organization said in a statement. It was fitting that approval Tuesday from the Boston Landmarks Commission

came on the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's death, organization Executive Director Imari Paris Jeffries said.

"Boston has the opportunity post-pandemic to continue and differentiate itself from the rest of the country by being one of the most welcoming, friendly, forward-looking cities in America," he said. "On the anniversary of the death of George Floyd and the national racial reckoning that followed, the approval of

'The Embrace' goes a long way in helping do just that." The civil rights leader and his wife first met in Boston in the early 1950s, when he was a doctoral student in theology at Boston University and she was studying at the New England Conservatory of Music.

The \$9.5 million sculpture consisting of four intertwined arms was inspired by a photo of the Kings embracing when MLK learned he had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. □

Court orders Royal Dutch Shell to cut net emissions by 45%

By **MIKE CORDER**

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A Dutch court on Wednesday ordered Royal Dutch Shell to cut its carbon emissions by net 45% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels in a landmark case brought by climate activism groups, which hailed the decision as a victory for the planet.

The Hague District Court ruled that the Anglo-Dutch energy giant has a duty of care to reduce emissions and that its current reduction plans were not concrete enough. The decision could set a precedent for similar cases against polluting multinationals around the world. Activists gathered outside the courtroom erupted into cheers as the decision was read out loud.

"The climate won today," said Roger Cox, a lawyer for the Dutch arm of Friends of the Earth, which was one of the organizations behind the case. "This ruling will change the world. Worldwide, people are in the starting blocks to take legal action against oil companies following our example," Cox added.



Milieudefensie director Donald Pols, right, celebrates the outcome of the verdict in the court case of Milieudefensie, the Dutch arm of the Friends of the Earth environmental organization, against Shell in The Hague, Netherlands, Wednesday, May 26, 2021. In a landmark legal battle of climate change activists in the Netherlands energy giant Shell was ordered to rein in its carbon emissions.
Associated Press

The Hague court did not say how Royal Dutch Shell should achieve the ordered cutback, saying the energy giant's parent company "has complete freedom in how it meets its reduction obligation and in shaping the Shell group's corporate policy." In a written reaction, Shell said it expects to appeal the "disappointing court decision."

The company said it is already "investing billions of dollars in low-carbon energy, including electric vehicle charging, hydrogen, renewables and biofuels. We want to grow demand for these products and scale up our new energy businesses even more quickly." At a hearing in December, Shell lawyer Dennis Horemans said a ruling against

the company could create a situation "in which countless parties can hold each other accountable for their role in that (energy) transition through the courts" and give judges "a central role in an active and delicate political process." Shell says it has set "an ambition to be a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050, or sooner."

The court said in an English language summary of its ruling that Shell was not currently in breach of its obligation to reduce emissions, as the environmental groups had argued, because the parent company was tightening its emissions policy.

But it ruled that Shell's policy "is not concrete, has many caveats and is based on monitoring social developments rather than the company's own responsibility for achieving a CO2 reduction."

A group of seven environmental and human rights organizations and some 17,000 Dutch citizens filed the case in 2018, calling on the court to order Shell to cut emissions in line with the global goals set out in the Paris climate agreement. That equates to Shell cutting emissions 45% by 2030. The court ruled on the claims by six of the groups. The case in the Netherlands is the latest in a string of legal challenges filed around the world by climate activists seeking action to rein in emissions, but it is believed to be the first targeting a multinational company. □

Taliban warns departing U.S. against new bases in region

By **KATHY GANNON**

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — The Taliban on Wednesday warned the departing U.S. military against setting up bases in the region, and Pakistan vowed no American bases will be allowed on its territory.

Pakistan also said drone strikes from Pakistani territory were also a non-starter. The statements come amid speculation the United States, as it withdraws the last of its 2,500-3,500 soldiers from Afghanistan, will want a nearby locale from which to launch strikes against militant targets.

The warning also comes during stepped-up efforts to jump-start stalled peace talks between the government and the Taliban, possibly in Turkey.

sibly in Turkey.

Both Pakistan and the Middle Eastern State of Qatar have been pressing the Taliban to attend talks in Turkey. U.N.-sponsored talks were to have been held last month in Turkey

but the Taliban refused to take part.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Tuesday told Pakistan's Senate the country would not allow American bases on its territory.

territory.

"Forget the past, but I want to tell the Pakistanis that no U.S. base will be allowed by Prime Minister Imran Khan so long he is in power," he said.

After the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Pakistan opened four air bases to the U.S.-led coalition to aid in its efforts in Afghanistan to hunt down the al-Qaida perpetrators of the attacks and unseat the Taliban rulers who had given them safe haven.

In his April speech announcing an end to America's "forever war," President Joe Biden said Washington would hold the Taliban and the government to its commitments to ensure Afghanistan could not again be used as a staging arena to attack the American homeland or its allies.

can homeland or its allies.

"We will not take our eye off the terrorist threat," said Biden. "We will reorganize our counterterrorism capabilities and the substantial assets in the region to prevent re-emergence of terrorist threat to our homeland over the horizon."

The U.S., along with about 7,000 NATO forces will leave Afghanistan by Sept. 11 at the latest. In a statement earlier this week, the U.S. Central Command said it had completed about 25% of its withdrawal. The logistics of withdrawing are tremendous and according to the CENTCOM statement departing troops have already packed military equipment on to 160 C-17 cargo aircraft and shipped them back to America. □



In this April 14, 2021 file photo, President Joe Biden speaks from the Treaty Room in the White House, about the withdrawal of the remainder of U.S. troops from Afghanistan.
Associated Press

Switzerland ends talks toward sweeping new accords with EU

By JAMEY KEATEN
and FRANK JORDANS
Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The Swiss government on Wednesday pulled out of years-long negotiations with the European Union on a comprehensive package of bilateral accords, after the two sides failed to reach agreement on the cross-border movement of jobseekers and other key issues. Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis said the government informed European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen about Switzerland's decision to withdraw from the talks a breakdown that could resonate with Britain as it seeks to flesh out its own ties with the EU following the wrenching, divisive Brexit process.

The collapse of talks could have significant repercussions for the wealthy Alpine nation of about 8.5 million people, which is all but surrounded by EU nations. Some 1.4 million EU citizens live in Switzerland, and about 340,000 people commute across the border to work in an array of Swiss industries.

The negotiations largely stumbled over EU demands for its citizens to have full access to the Swiss labor



In this Friday, July 12, 2019 file photo, Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis attends a joint news conference after talks in Ankara, Turkey.

market, including those seeking work. Switzerland had resisted such a move. Cassis said it could mark a "paradigm shift" which might result in non-Swiss citizens getting social security rights. Cassis said Switzerland hoped to remain a close partner of the 27-nation bloc, with which it has more than 100 bilateral treaties, but also suggested his country deserved respect it wasn't getting from the EU. "We want Switzer-

land to be treated on an equal footing compared to other third-party states (outside the EU), whether it's a question of cooperation or the recognition of equal standards," Cassis told reporters in Bern, the capital. The EU's executive Commission expressed regret at what it called a "unilateral" Swiss decision, and said the negotiations were aimed to ensure that anyone with access to the bloc's single market fac-

es the same conditions. It said decades-old EU-Swiss agreements were "not up to speed" for current bilateral ties. But the bloc has been unflinching in its previous warnings about what a failure to strike the "institutional framework agreement" would mean. The EU has circulated a fact sheet suggesting that a lack of common rules could cause Switzerland to lose its "privileged" connection with the bloc's electricity

system and that the lack of a framework accord was "hampering access of Swiss air carriers to the EU's internal market." The EU also suggested that cooperation in the health sector or labor market would suffer. It has warned that failure to reach an agreement could harm numerous existing agreements, including cooperation in the areas of trade, education and research. Over the years, the Swiss have demonstrated hot-and-cold attitudes about EU migrants, which has put pressure on top politicians in a country where a nationalist, populist party still holds the most seats in parliament. Cassis acknowledged that the potential cost of granting the EU's demands were only part of the calculation. "A very important element, which the federal council perhaps considered more serious, was the political dimension," he said. "If there's one issue that's delicate and sensitive in the population, it's the issue of free movement." The minister suggested that after spending years fine-tuning its immigration policy to achieve "social peace," the Swiss government did not want to upset that balance. □

Associated Press

Indian farmers mark 6 months of protest with no end in sight

RISHABH RAJ JAIN
Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian farmers demanding the government repeal new agriculture laws they say will devastate their livelihoods marked their protest movement's sixth month Wednesday by flying black banners on the cars and tractors and burning effigies of the prime minister. Protesters have been blocking three highways connecting New Delhi to northern and western cities since November to press their demand for scrapping of the laws they say will favor large corporate farms. The protest has continued despite a surge in coronavirus cases that has

overwhelmed the country. The black flags were flown Wednesday in several cities, towns and villages around the capital. Some burned effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Modi your dictatorship will not last," some farmers chanted. The government says the laws approved by Parliament last year will inject private investment in the agriculture sector and raise the earnings of farmers by setting up warehouses in rural areas where they can store their crops and sell them when prices favor them. The farmers say the new legislation will devastate their earnings by ending

guaranteed pricing and force them to sell their crops to corporations at cheaper prices. In January, the Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the new laws and created a committee to address the farmer's grievances. Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar has held several rounds of talks with protest leaders and offered to suspend the laws for a year and a half during which a solution can be reached through dialogue. The farmers are demanding an immediate repeal of the laws. The protests turned violent on Jan. 26, India's Republic Day, when tens of thou-



Farmers, some carrying black flags, on a vehicle during a protest in Ghazipur, outskirts of New Delhi, India, Wednesday, May 26, 2021.

Associated Press

sands of farmers riding tractors stormed India's historic Red Fort. Clashes between the protesters and govern-

ment forces left one protester dead and nearly 400 police officers injured. □

Yemen officials demand answers after AP report on air base

By JON GAMBRELL

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) —

Yemeni officials demanded answers Wednesday after an Associated Press report highlighted a mysterious air base being built on a Yemeni island in one of the world's crucial maritime chokepoints.

A lawmaker asked Yemen's internationally recognized government if the United Arab Emirates built the facility as data in the AP report links the UAE to the construction.

Another official openly criticized the UAE for "undermining" the government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. A Saudi-led coalition fought on the government's behalf when it entered Yemen's long war in 2015 against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels now holding its capital.

The UAE, home to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, has not responded to repeated requests for comment regarding the base and offered no immediate reaction Wednesday to the officials' comments.

The runway on Mayun Is-



This Tuesday, May 25, 2021, satellite image released by Planet Labs Inc. shows a mysterious air base being built on Yemen's volcanic Mayun Island.

Associated Press

land allows whoever controls it to project power into the strait and easily launch airstrikes into mainland Yemen, convulsed by a yearslong bloody war. It also provides a base for any operations into the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden

and nearby East Africa.

Satellite images from Planet Labs Inc. obtained by the AP showed dump trucks and graders building a 1.85 kilometer (6,070-foot) runway on the island on April 11. By May 18, that work appeared complete, with

three hangars constructed on a tarmac just south of the runway. Images from Tuesday showed vehicles parked at the base's newly built hangars. A runway of that length can accommodate attack, surveillance and transport aircraft. An

earlier effort begun toward the end of 2016 and later abandoned had workers try to build an even-larger runway over 3 kilometers (9,800 feet) long, which would allow for the heaviest bombers. That earlier effort also saw ships linked to the UAE take part in the construction. Military officials with Yemen's internationally recognized government, which the Saudi-led coalition has backed since 2015, say the UAE is building the runway. The officials, speaking earlier to the AP on condition of anonymity as they didn't have authorization to brief journalists, say Emirati ships transported military weapons, equipment and troops to Mayun Island in recent weeks. The military officials said recent tension between the UAE and Hadi came in part from an Emirati demand for his government to sign a 20-year lease agreement for Mayun Island, also known as Perim Island. Emirati officials have not acknowledged any disagreement and said they were withdrawing from the war in 2019. □

Mexico: Builders bulldozing outskirts of Teotihuacan ruins

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The Mexican government said Tuesday that a private building project is destroying part of the outskirts of the pre-Hispanic ruin site of Teotihuacán, just north of Mexico City.

The Culture Department said it has repeatedly issued stop-work orders since March but the building crews have ignored them. The department estimated at least 25 ancient structures on the site are threatened, and it has filed a criminal complaint against those responsible. Apparently, owners of farm plots are trying to turn the land into some sort of amusement park. The area is just outside and across a road from the site's famous boulevard and pyramid complex.

The U.N. international council on monuments and sites said bulldozers threaten to raze as many as 15 acres (7 hectares) at the site, which is a protected area. The council also said looting of artifacts had been detected.

"Teotihuacán is an emblematic site declared as World Heritage by the UNESCO, that represents the highest expression of the identity of the people of Mexico," the U.N. council said in a statement.

Mexico has long been unable to enforce building codes and zoning laws or stop illegal construction, in part because of the country's unwieldy, antiquated legal system.

The destruction so close to the capital raises questions about Mexico's ability

to protect its ancient heritage sites. Teotihuacan is the country's most visited archaeological site, with over 2.6 million visitors per year, and it has hundreds of smaller, more remote and often unexplored sites. Teotihuacan is best known for its twin Temples of the Sun and Moon, but it was actually a large city that housed over 100,000 inhabitants and covered around 8 square miles (20 sq. kilometers).

The still mysterious city was one of the largest in the world at its apex between 100 B.C. and A.D. 750. But it was abandoned before the rise of the Aztecs in the 14th century.

Even its true name remains unclear. Its current name was given to it by the Aztecs. □



In this March 19, 2020 file photo, the Pyramid of the Moon, left, and the Pyramid of the Sun, back right, are seen along with smaller structures lining the Avenue of the Dead, in Teotihuacan, Mexico.

Associated Press

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Nancy Cirillo honored as Goodwill Ambassador

EAGLE ARUBA — Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor one of Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as a Goodwill Ambassador of Aruba. The symbolic Goodwill Ambassador certificate is presented to guests who visit Aruba 20 years or more consecutively.

The honoree was the lovely Mrs. Nancy Cirillo who has been visiting Aruba over 26 years consecutively. Just a few more years and she will be entitled to receive the Emerald Ambassador Certificate. The symbolic Emerald Ambassador Certificate is presented to guests who visit Aruba 35 years or more consecutively.

This lovely lady stated that she loves the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches, delicious variety of foods, its safety, and Aruba's warm and friendly people who have become like family to her.

Richardson together with the representatives of the Casa Del Mar Beach Resort presented the Goodwill Ambassador certificate to the honoree, handed over some presents, and thanked her for choosing Aruba as her favorite vacation destination and as her home-away-from-home.



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Travellers' Choice 2020

Aruba Election 2021

ORANJESTAD — Aruba is due to hold general elections on June 25, 2021. Voters will elect all 21 members of the Estates (Staten), Aruba's unicameral parliament. The election should have taken place in September of 2021, but due to the resignation of the government on March 31st, 2021, before its legal four-year term, a new date had been stipulated according to the regulations as per Aruba's Constitution.

Aruba elects on national level a legislature. The Estates (Staten) consists of 21 members, elected for a four-year term by Open list Party-list proportional representation, meaning that voters have at least some influence on the order in which a party's candidates are elected. Seats are distributed between parties that have gained at least one full quota (1/21, or approximately 4.76% of the vote) using the Hagenbach-Bischoff system (a variant of the D'Hondt method). Before obtaining the status as land/country in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Aruba participated in elections for its Island Council and for the Aruba constituency of the parliament of the Netherlands Antilles.

Aruba is a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It has full autonomy over internal affairs, while the Dutch



government handles foreign and defense policy. Following Aruba's 2017 elections, the governing coalition is led by the social democratic People's Electoral Movement (MEP) party together with political parties POR and RED. The main opposition is the center-right Aruban People's Party (AVP), which holds nine of the 21 seats in the Estates. This year Aruba has a total of 11 parties taking part at the election 2021. They are MEP, AVP, POR, RED, PPA, RAIZ, MAS, UPP, HTC, CURPA, PP and ACCION 21.

Candidate lists

Submission of the candidate lists of political parties took place on May 7, 2021. Due to the Covid-19 situation only the authorized representative and 1 candidate or party leader on the list were allowed to be present at the personal submission that took place at the townhall in Oranjestad. Party lists may contain up to 29 candidates. Qualified electors must be 18 years and older

Continued from Page 8

Aruba Election 2021

Continued on Page 9

Color by parties

The following colors for the color print of the lists of candidates on the ballot paper can be used by political parties in the elections of 25 June 2021. These colors are: brown, light blue, dark blue, yellow, green, light gray, dark gray, orange, light orange, red, light pink, magenta, light purple, dark purple, khaki, white, olive green.

Voter Requirements

Voters must be residents of Aruba of at least 18 years of age with Dutch citizenship.

Electoral Debate

The Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the University of Aruba will be organizing 2 debates, which will take place on June 3rd and June 17th, 2021. Leaders of all the participating political parties will be invited to the debates. Topics such as economy, public finance, labor, health, tourism, social affairs, education and justice will be discussed. Each party will be able to bring its plan of action, proposals and solutions based on challenges and opportunities for Aruba.

Campaign

In Aruba it is a custom to have candidates going

to visit the people at their houses or holding informative sections all around the island. So, if you see groups of people walking with flags, t-shirt and perhaps some music on, don't panic they are just spreading the word for their candidate to the locals. Most of the candidates also have their own social media page or programs where they try to connect to as many people as possible to get their word out. Also, most parties are recycling old campaign material and distribute these to their followers.

On June 25, 2021 we will find out if we will have a one party or a coalition once again to run our island for the next four-year term. □

4.1 Results of elections to Parliament

	2009	2013	2017
Number of persons with voting right	64,602	68,758	70,750
Number of persons who did vote	55,750	58,350	59,430
% of turn-out ¹	86.3	84.9	84
Valid votes	55,121	57,794	58,652
Invalid votes	629	556	751
Abstentions	8,852	10,408	11,347
Quota	2,624	2,752	2,792

Source: Population Registry Office

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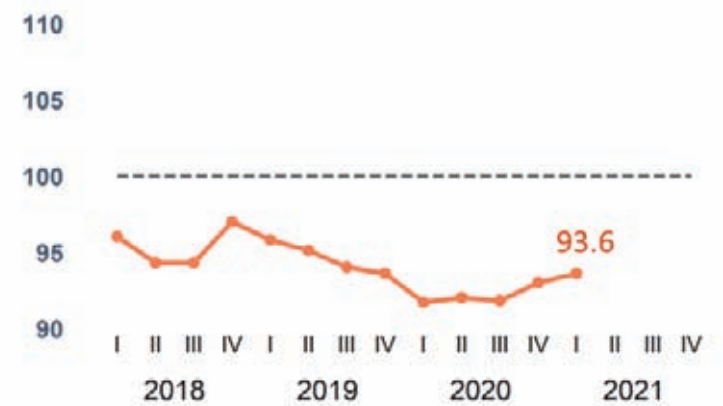
Consumer confidence less pessimistic Results for the first quarter of 2021

ORANJESTAD — During the first quarter of 2021, consumers felt less pessimistic as the consumer confidence index picked up by 0.6 index point to 93.6.

By the end of the first quarter, top of mind consumer concerns were their employment opportunities as 70 percent of respondents reported that finding a job has become more difficult over the past 6 months. Also, 65 percent perceived the financial position of the

government to have worsened, while 64 percent indicated that they were still worried about their personal health. Noticeable is that 72 percent reported that they would get vaccinated in 2021. In addition, 56 percent felt a deterioration of business and economic conditions, while 55 percent stated that their household's financial situation remained the same throughout the past 6 months.

In the first quarter of 2021, the present situation index grew by 0.4 index point to 92.1, while the future expectation index rated 96.0, up from 94.2 in the previous quarter, reflecting less negative sentiments amongst respondents. More than half (56 percent) of respondents expected the Aruban economy to take more than 2 years to fully recover from the COVID-19 crisis. Also, 72 percent reported that buying a car was not suitable, 67 percent indi-



cated that taking out a loan was not appropriate, and close to 62 percent noted that going on vacation or taking out a mortgage was unsuitable. Consequently, the consumer purchasing habit index stood at 93.6 in the first quarter of 2021, up

from 93.4 in the last quarter of 2020.

More information on the Consumer Confidence survey is available on CBA's website <https://www.cba-ruba.org>.

Centrale Bank van Aruba

Aruba's underwater wonderland

ORANJESTAD - Exploring the underwater wonders is something you should definitely do during your stay in Aruba. The underwater world has everything to offer that makes a snorkel trip so exceptional; an impressive, colorful sea life with exotic fishes, turtles and beautiful coral reef. The historic shipwrecks, located on the Aruban seabed are also worth a visit. Aruba is known for its white beaches and blue oceans, which means there are many fascinating under water spots, where you can take your snorkeling gear and we selected the top spots for you.

Tres Trapi



Tres Trapi means tree steps in Papiamentu, Papiamentu is together with Dutch the official language spoken on Aruba. The beach is called Tres Trapi because it is accessible by the tree steps carved into the rocks. Tres Trapi is a small rocky beach, located on the north-western side of the island, approximately 5 to 10 minute drive from Palm Beach. From the unique steps you can easily walk over the beach into the clear and turquoise blue ocean. While snorkeling you will encounter all kind of tropical fishes and sea stars. The kind of starfish you will find in the Aruban waters is the red cushion sea star. This is a starfish that is commonly found in the shallow waters of the Caribbean sea and if you are lucky during your snorkeling visit to Tres Trapi, you may come across one of the green sea turtles. Respect the animal, keep your dis-

tance and enjoy the view. Also remember; it is a once in a life time experience.

Antilla shipwreck



Antilla is a 400-foot-long long ship, built in 1939 in Hamburg, Germany. Antilla came to Aruba, because it had to find a neutral port. When Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, the crew decided to let their own ship sink, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Dutch Navy. Antilla lies on its portside in Malmok bay, and the sunken word war two ship is now one of Aruba's most popular snorkeling and dive spots. However, the ship wreck can only be reached by boat. The ship is visible from the surface and during your snorkeling trip you be surrounded by hundreds of tropical fishes, but the ship wreck alone is already impressive enough.

Baby Beach



Baby beach; a white beach, with a crys-



tal blue ocean. The beach is located on the southern part of the island. On the way to the famous beach, you will drive through the old capital of Aruba, San Nicolas. The old Aruban culture can be still felt and experienced here, so do not hesitate to get out of your car and walk around for a while. Baby beach is a child friendly beach, since it is shallow and the water has a pleasant temperature. The name therefore fits well with the beach. Baby beach is an excellent beach for snorkeling, especially if you want to go with small children, because the water remains shallow and there are still many underwater wonders to see. In the ocean there is an area marked until where it is recommended to snorkel and on the beach you will find different facilities. It is a perfect beach to spend your day snorkeling and relaxing.

Mangel Halto

Mangel Halto beach is located in Savaneta, on the southern-west part of the island. The beach is different from the other beaches in Aruba; it is beach full of mangroves. You reach the beach by a bridge through the mangroves and then you will have several entrances to the sea. There are diverse spots where you can enjoy a perfect beach day, wooden stairs made to enter the water and a dock to sit on and enjoy the view. Mangel Halto is also worth a visit for the snorkeling experience. Inside the bay, the water is clear and you find many colorful fish. Outside the bay is a bit more challenging for beginners because of the wind and the waves, but the coral is alive and it is just like snorkel heaven.

What would it take to solve the student debt crisis?

By **ANNA HELHOSKI** of **NerdWallet**

The possibility of federal student loan forgiveness grabs all the headlines. But experts say no single policy not even wiping the slate clean for millions of borrowers solves the root causes of the nation's \$1.74 trillion student loan debt crisis.

That debt has been fueled by decades of wages not keeping up with the rising cost of college. And unless wages increase and college costs decrease, students will still need to take on debt to complete degrees, and they'll face greater difficulty repaying loans.

"There are no \$1.7 trillion silver bullets," says Seth Frotman, executive director of the Student Borrower Protection Center, a nonprofit advocacy organization.

So what could work? It'll take more than a headline-grabbing wipeout of student debt.

Frotman says, in addition to canceling debt, he would prioritize efforts to make college more affordable and to reform the borrowing and repayment systems. Michele Streeter, senior policy analyst at The Institute for College Access and Success, says student loans remain an important college access tool for students, but forgiveness and repayment programs should be easier to access and automated whenever possible. As a new crop of students gets ready to bor-



Associated Press

row for college and multiple generations of borrowers grapple with debt, experts weigh in on possible solutions.

FORGIVE STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Broad forgiveness around \$10,000, for example could help the most vulnerable borrowers: those who never graduated and lack the bigger paychecks that typically come with a degree to pay off the debt they acquired along the way.

Experts diverge on whether there should be broad forgiveness. But if it does happen, they agree future debt accumulation must be addressed.

"Until somebody can come up with a proposal for what happens on day two and everyone starts borrow-

ing again, that will be one major hurdle to any level of forgiveness," says Carlo Salerno, vice president for research at CampusLogic, a developer of college financial aid management tools.

STREAMLINE EXISTING FORGIVENESS PROGRAMS

There's too much red tape inherent to existing forgiveness programs, experts say. Salerno calls it a "bureaucracy and paperwork crisis." These programs have low rates of acceptance: As of November 2020, 6,493 Public Service Loan Forgiveness applications, or 2.2%, were approved, and so far just 32 borrowers total have received income-driven repayment forgiveness (though most won't be eligible until 2035).

Democrats in Congress have suggested making all federal student loans and repayment plans eligible for PSLF, waiving restrictions for forgiveness and automatically qualifying borrowers.

CUT OR LOWER INTEREST RATES

Federal student loan borrowers haven't had to make payments since March 13, 2020, and they won't again until Oct. 1. During this pause, zero interest is accruing. That means loans won't grow and, if you can afford to make payments, you can pay off your debt faster. Making zero interest permanent or lowering interest on existing debt could help borrowers pay off their debt without growing the

principal, says Betsy Mayotte, president and founder of The Institute of Student Loan Advisors.

"They say, 'I feel like I should pay (my loans) back, but I don't feel like I'm on a level playing field because of the interest,'" Mayotte says.

CONDENSE INCOME-DRIVEN REPAYMENT

Income-driven repayment plans, federal options that set student loan payments at a portion of a borrower's income, are a strong safety net. But experts say the four income-driven options — in addition to the three other federal repayment plans — should be streamlined into one new program. Some suggest automating enrollment.

"There's no rhyme or reason for the variety of programs that exist in this space other than they were developed over time," says Beth Akers, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative public policy think tank, where she focuses on the economics of higher education.

Wesley Whistle, senior advisor for policy and strategy at New America, a left-of-center public policy think tank, says automatic enrollment into an IDR plan could benefit delinquent or defaulted borrowers, but is concerned about auto-enrolling students right out of college and its effect on their ability to repay the principal. For many, payments may not even cover interest. □

Jeff Bezos says will pass baton to new Amazon CEO on July 5



In this June 6, 2019 file photo, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos speaks at the the Amazon re:MARS convention, in Las Vegas.

Associated Press

By **JOSEPH PISANI**
AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has picked a date to step down as CEO.

Bezos, who grew Amazon from an internet bookstore to an online shopping behemoth, said Wednesday that Amazon executive Andy Jassy will take over the CEO role on July 5.

"We chose that date because it's sentimental for me," Bezos said during an Amazon shareholder

meeting Wednesday. He explained that it was exactly 27 years ago on that date in 1994 that Amazon was incorporated.

Seattle-based Amazon.com Inc. announced that Bezos was stepping down as CEO in February, but didn't provide a specific date. Jassy, his replacement, currently runs the company's cloud-computing business.

Bezos, 57 and with a personal fortune of \$167 billion, won't be going far.

He will become executive chair at Amazon and focus on new products and initiatives. He also plans to focus on his other ventures, such as his rocket ship company, Blue Origin, and his newspaper, The Washington Post.

On Wednesday, Amazon also announced it would buy storied Hollywood studio MGM for \$8.45 billion with the hopes of filling its video streaming service with more shows and movies to watch. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

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13 Necktie

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14 Globe

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15 Rogue

17 Bear's lair

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26 Salt Lake

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27 Criminals,

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30 Snared,

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32 Crooked

33 Taxing

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Yesterday's answer

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13				14					
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42						43			
44						45			

5-27

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

5-27

CRYPTOQUOTE

D F I C F M ' B C L F N M H D

U V K K Q M O Q M B A Z N V B Z L :

D F I C L F N M H D X B V D Q M O

BAZLZ. — ZCNQM KFIQX GFKZ

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: HEAVY HEARTS, LIKE HEAVY CLOUDS IN THE SKY, ARE BEST RELIEVED BY THE LETTING OF A LITTLE WATER. — CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Buildup to super blood moon eclipses the finale



The Earth's shadow falls partly across the full moon at the start of a total lunar eclipse above Sydney Wednesday, May 26, 2021.

Associated Press

By NICK PERRY

Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — In the end, the buildup seemed to eclipse the finale.

People across New Zealand and around the world stayed up Wednesday to watch a cosmic event called a super blood moon, a combination of a total lunar eclipse and a brighter-than-usual super-moon.

During the buildup, a glittering moon rose above the horizon. As the Earth's shadow began taking bites from the moon, it created a dramatic effect. Half the moon vanished, leaving it looking like a black-and-white cookie.

When the full eclipse took hold, however, the moon darkened, turning a smudgy burnt orange color for many viewers.

In celestial terms, it was a wonder: a projection of the world's sunsets and sunrises onto the black canvas of the eclipsed moon. But for people peering up from their backyards, it wasn't quite the brilliant display they'd anticipated. Not quite super or blood-colored.

"It was not that vivid for those on ground," said Ben Noll, a meteorologist with New Zealand scientific research agency NIWA. "Personally, I thought there would be a bit more red in the sky."

Still, Noll thought that overall, the evening was sensational. He heard plenty of people cheering and cars honking in downtown Auckland where he watched it all unfold.

John Rowe, an educator at the Stardome Observatory & Planetarium in Auckland, said it was like the moon turned into a big, spooky smile looking down at him. That's because of a bright rim that remained at the bottom.

Rowe also enjoyed seeing surrounding stars appear to brighten as the light from the moon dimmed.

The full eclipse lasted about 15 minutes, while the whole cosmic show lasted five hours. A partial eclipse began as the moon edged into the Earth's outer shadow, called the penumbra, before moving more fully into the main shadow and then reversing the process.

Rowe likes to imagine it as if he's standing on the moon. The Earth would come across and block out the sun. The reddish light around the edges would be the sunsets and sunrises happening at that time on Earth, projected onto the moon's surface. Pretty cool, he reckons.

The color of the moon during the total eclipse can appear different depending on where people are in the world, and by factors like the amount of dust in the atmosphere and global weather.

In much of New Zealand, the weather remained calm and clear on Wednesday, providing excellent viewing conditions.

The same was true in Australia, although those in South Korea struck out because rain and cloudy weather across much of the country obscured the eclipse. There also was disappointment in Japan because of cloudy weather, with many posting messages like "I can't see anything" on Twitter.

Some places in the Pacific and East Asia got to see the show before midnight, while night owls in Hawaii and the western part of North America got to watch it in the early morning hours.

Sky gazers along the U.S. East Coast were out of luck because the moon was setting and the sun rising. Europe, Africa and western Asia all missed out as well. □

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Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
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A year later, Krasinski's 'Quiet Place' ready to make noise

By JAKE COYLE

AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — John Krasinski, whose "A Quiet Place Part II" is one of the biggest studio releases to open exclusively in theaters this year, recently returned to the movies, himself.

Krasinski screened the film for his in-laws in London, and the experience of being back in a theater was unexpectedly moving.

"It's a sanctuary to begin with for me. It's one of my favorite places. Emily and I go on movie dates pretty much every week," Krasinski says, referring to Emily Blunt, his wife. "But going back this time had a lot more weight to it. Seeing my movie up there felt more emotional because of all we've been waiting for."

The wait for "A Quiet Place Part II" has been as long as the pandemic. Last March, its release was imminent just as COVID-19 shut down U.S. theaters. A premiere was held in New York on March 8, 2020. Buzz was strong. Opening-weekend box office was expected to exceed \$50 million.

But one delay followed another as Paramount Pictures and "A Quiet Place Part II" awaited the chance to return to the big screen. While many other films were sold off to streaming services (including Paramount's own "Coming 2 America" and "The Trial of the Chicago 7"), holding out for theaters was essential for Krasinski. His movie is predicated not just on science-fiction spectacle but an immersive and chilling sound design.

"For me, it was non-negotiable. We designed this movie to be for theaters, specifically," Krasinski said in a recent interview by Zoom from his home in Brooklyn during a break from shooting the Amazon series "Jack Ryan." "I said I really wanted to wait for theaters and they supported it from the very beginning. Even more so, I give them so much credit for going with me on being this early."

"A Quiet Place Part II,"



This image released by Paramount Pictures shows director John Krasinski, left, and Emily Blunt on the set of "A Quiet Place Part II."

which opens in theaters Friday, is an intensely realized nightmare that will try, with jolts and jump scares, to awaken moviegoing from its pandemic slumber. As the Memorial Day weekend kickoff to Hollywood's delayed summer season, it will pose a much-watched stress test for the industry's theatrical future. It's a high-pressure position that Krasinski meets with a mixture of pride and anxiety.

"It's definitely thrilling and nerve-racking and all those things at the same time," he says. "But that's what our movie is."

"A Quiet Place," written and directed by Krasinski, followed the Abbott family (played by Krasinski, Blunt, Millicent Simmonds, Noah Jupe and an infant) in an upstate New York dystopia where creatures with hypersensitive hearing stalk the land, ruthlessly hunting by sound. It was a hit, grossing \$340 million globally on a \$17 million budget. Pressure for a sequel, naturally, grew.

"I was like, no, just preserve it," Blunt said in an interview last year. "Paramount said we're going to make

one, whether we were a part of it or not. I think that was what they wanted. But John just then came up with the most undeniable idea."

Krasinski's idea: Make Simmonds' character the lead. In "Part II," the surviving Abbotts are forced to leave their home and, on barefoot tiptoes, search beyond for any remaining humans, and maybe some sanctuary. The scope and scale of "A Quiet Place" enlarges, while the story remains focused on family.

"If the first one was a love letter to my kids, this one's a letter to my kids about what I hope they are going forward in their lives, which is brave and courageous not only for their own happiness but also to make real change," says Krasinski. In the first "A Quiet Place," Simmonds' character, Regan, figures out a way to defeat the creatures by using her hearing aid to create feedback intolerable to their ears.

In the second film, she grows even bolder with her unique power.

"I knew that she could carry the entire franchise," says

Krasinski. "She's one of the most stunning actors I've ever worked with. She's so incredibly talented but also so emotional intelligent."

Before Krasinski had even shared his script with Blunt, he contacted Simmonds by Facetime to tell her she would be the sequel's lead. "She immediately covered her mouth and was shocked," says Krasinski. "She turned to her mom and then this look came back that was as heroic as her character. She looked at the camera and said, 'I'll do it.'"

Simmonds, the 18-year-old who starred in Todd Haynes' "Wonderstruck," was surprised by the opportunity but resolved to do her best in a role that simultaneously drew from her own strength and encouraged greater confidence in herself.

"As a person, I'm a little bit more shy. I might fade into the background a little more than Regan," Simmonds says through an interpreter by Zoom. "But playing Regan really helped me because Regan was very confident in herself, and that really affect-

ed me. In the first film, she wasn't as confident. She was highly self-critical and blamed herself for a lot of the things that happened to the family. That's something that I experienced personally. I thought to myself: What if I wasn't deaf? What if I was a quote-unquote 'normal person?'

"But when Regan became this powerhouse in the second film, I realized that she was using what she had — all of her deficits, if you will — as strengths," says Simmonds. That gave me a new perspective on myself. I was able to look at myself and say: I'm not broken. I'm unique. I have something to offer and I can take that and use it as an advantage."

The two "A Quiet Place" films, where sign language is a life-saver, are part of a surge of recent films that authentically and dynamically represent characters with hearing impairment, including last year's "Sound of Metal" and the upcoming "CODA."

Simmonds, who during the pandemic helped create transparent face masks to aid in lip-reading, believes the movie industry is progressing in the right direction — and that people like herself shouldn't be shocked at fronting a summer blockbuster.

"We need to start asking ourselves: Why not me?" says Simmonds.

After "A Quiet Place Part II," Krasinski will pass writing and directing a third installment to Jeff Nichols ("Mud," "Take Shelter"), who Krasinski says just turned in his script. More films beyond that, he grants, are also possible.

Like most upcoming films, "A Quiet Place Part II" will have a shorter, 45-day run in theaters before streaming, on Paramount+.

But in the week before release, Krasinski is traveling nationwide to surprise moviegoers and rekindle some of the communal excitement of going to the movies. "Finally," he told a crowd in Cleveland, "I'm all dressed up with somewhere to go." □

Associated Press



Ireland's Daniel Martin celebrates after winning the 17th stage of the Giro d'Italia cycling race, from Canazei to Seggiano, Italy, Wednesday, May 26, 2021.

Associated Press

Martin wins Stage 17; Bernal loses 3 seconds of Giro lead

SEGGIANO, Italy (AP) — Irish cyclist Daniel Martin won the 17th stage of the Giro d'Italia on Wednesday to complete a set of Grand Tour victories, while Egan Bernal had three seconds shaved off his overall lead and saw one of his main rivals gain significant time after a disappointing day in the high mountains. Martin, who rides for Israel Start-Up Nation, attacked from a breakaway at the start of a tough climb to the summit finish and rode solo to victory to add to his two stage wins in both the Tour de France and the Spanish Vuelta. "That's what I came here for and I knew that today was one of my last opportunities," the 34-year-old Martin said. "With the extra time I lost the day before

the rest day, I knew it was possible I go in the breakaway."

João Almeida was second, 13 seconds behind Martin at the end of the 193-kilometer (120-mile) route from Canazei to Seggiano that also featured two other categorized climbs.

Simon Yates crossed the line in third, 30 seconds behind Martin, to move up from fifth into third place overall, 3 minutes, 23 seconds behind Bernal.

Bernal, who rides for Ineos Grenadiers, was dropped from the group of his main rivals shortly before the end of the climb and crossed in seventh.

The 2019 Tour champion saw his lead cut slightly to 2:21 ahead of Damiano Caruso.

"Today was not my best

day but I didn't lose much time, just a few seconds from Caruso," Bernal said.

"In the end, it's another day out, now let's think about tomorrow."

Thursday's 18th stage is the Giro's longest leg. The 231-kilometer (144-mile) route from Rovereto to Stradella is mainly flat but there are a series of short climbs through the rolling Pavia winelands to the finish. The Giro finishes on Sunday in Milan with an individual time trial.

"I have some advantage with Yates, so I need to ... just to arrive with some time to Milan," Bernal said. "And then if I win the Giro with one second or two minutes for me it will be the same." □



Cuba's pitcher Yoanni Yera Montalvo, left, throws the ball as his teammates smile watching him during a training session at the Estadio Latinoamericano in Havana, Cuba, Tuesday, May 18, 2021.

Associated Press

U.S. grants Cuban baseball players visas days before tourney

HAVANA (AP) — The U.S. government finally issued visas for the players and coaches of the Cuban national baseball team to compete in the Baseball Americas Olympic qualifying tournament starting Monday in Florida.

Players and executives with the Cuban team had expressed concern about delays in the visas for the tourney to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics, which had led them to apply for them in Mexico, Panama and Guyana. U.S. sanctions had hindered applying for the visas in Havana, but arrangements were made at the U.S. Embassy in Cuba's capital.

"This afternoon we were notified about the issuance of visas," said a statement released Tuesday by the Cuban Baseball Federation.

"The news has been received with pleasure by the members of our team, given that the decision, as we have repeated in recent days, is essential for realizing our fight for our dream in Tokyo."

According to Cuba's baseball federation, the athletes would travel in "the next few hours" to Florida. The tournament runs from May 31 to June 5 in West Palm Beach and Port St. Lucie, but exhibition matches are scheduled before that.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez, on his Twitter account, thanked "all the institutions and individuals who with good will and active management helped overcome the multiple obstacles."

With three gold and two silver medals, Cuba has dominated Olympic baseball.

Eight nations — Cuba, the United States, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Colombia and Canada — will be battling for one spot in the six-team Tokyo Olympic baseball tournament. □



Joe West breaks umpiring record with 5,376th game

By JAY COHEN

AP Baseball Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — No arguing this: Cowboy Joe is No. 1 on the chart.

Joe West set baseball's umpiring record when the Chicago White Sox beat the St. Louis Cardinals 8-3 on Tuesday night. West was behind the plate for his 5,376th regular-season game, snapping a tie with Hall of Famer Bill Klem.

West, who reached the majors in 1976 and turns 69 on Oct. 31, got his picture taken with his crew before the game started. He also posed for photos with managers Tony La Russa of the White Sox and Mike Shildt of the Cardinals.

After the lineup cards were exchanged, St. Louis pitcher Adam Wainwright walked out to the plate to shake West's hand.

West was visited by baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred, former Commissioner Peter Ueberroth and White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf. The ump's supporters in the crowd included country music singer Emmylou Harris and former NBA center Mark Eaton, a conspicuous 7-foot-4 figure in the postgame picture with West surrounded by an eclectic group of connections from his long career.

"It was tough to hold back a tear or two, but Tom Hanks said there is no crying in baseball, so you can't do it," West said, referring to Hanks' iconic line in the movie "A League of Their Own."

"It was a very nice thing,"



Home plate umpire Joe West throws a new ball to the mound after the St. Louis Cardinals batted in the second inning of a baseball game between the Chicago White Sox and Cardinals on Tuesday, May 25, 2021, in Chicago.

Associated Press

he said.

The White Sox recognized West's achievement on the scoreboard, and then showed a video with country music star Garth Brooks and some of West's former and current umpiring colleagues offering their congratulations. The crowd responded with mostly boos. The San Diego Chicken mascot was on hand, too, presenting West with flowers during the game.

The colorful West is perhaps the most famous umpire in major league history, known for his memorable run-ins with several players and managers over the years, to go along with at least one executive. West said he will decide at the end of the season if he

wants to keep working as an umpire.

He also fashions himself as a country music singer and songwriter, leading to the nicknames "Cowboy Joe" and "Country Joe." The Oak Ridge Boys, members of the Country Music Hall of Fame and friends with West, sung the national anthem before his record-breaking game.

West began his big league career at age 23, doing a handful of games in the last month of the 1976 season. His first plate job included Hall of Fame knuckleballer Phil Niekro throwing to young Braves catcher Dale Murphy.

He has worked the World Series six times. He has 193 career ejections — and

West himself has run afoul of Major League Baseball on occasion during his long career.

During a 1990 brawl, West body-slammed pitcher Dennis Cook to the ground. After he was thrown out by West during a 2018 game, White Sox shortstop Tim Anderson said: "I don't have much to say about him. Everybody knows he's terrible."

Last year, West ejected Washington Nationals general manager Mike Rizzo from an upstairs suite in Atlanta for yelling and complaining.

West was suspended for three days without pay in 2017 after he said in an interview that former Texas Rangers third baseman

Adrián Beltré was baseball's biggest complainer. West said he was joking, and Beltré agreed.

He was awarded \$500,000 last month in a defamation suit against former catcher Paul Lo Duca. In his suit, among other things, West contended Lo Duca made false allegations that would hurt his chances of being elected to the Hall of Fame. There are currently 10 umpires in the Hall.

West also has his share of fans. La Russa called West "very consistent."

"It's richly deserved, earned, to hold the record," said the 76-year-old La Russa, a Hall of Famer. "I mean you have Joe calling the game, bases, but especially behind the plate, you're going to get an outstanding major league job." At the 2017 All-Star Game, slugger Nelson Cruz came to the plate, pulled out his phone and had catcher Yadier Molina take a picture of Cruz and plate umpire West. Asked why, Cruz said: "He's a legend, you know?"

Before he became a big league umpire, West was a star quarterback at Elon in the early 1970s. He also was a catcher when he played baseball growing up in North Carolina.

The Asheville native was inducted into the Elon Sports Hall of Fame in 1986 and the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in 2018.

Several years ago, West had larynx cancer, underwent radiation and continued his career. □



New York Knicks' Julius Randle looks to pass during the first half of Game 1 of an NBA basketball first-round playoff series against the Atlanta Hawks, Sunday, May 23, 2021, in New York.

Associated Press

Knicks' Julius Randle wins NBA's Most Improved Player award

By BRIAN MAHONEY

AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Julius Randle is in his seventh season, later than the usual Most Improved Player winner. He is aware of the notion that by then, players have already shown what they are in the NBA and they're not going to get any better.

He also knows he's not that type of player.

"For me, it's always about continuing to improve," Randle said. He did that across the board this season and was rewarded Tuesday with a runaway in the voting for the award after leading the New York Knicks to the playoffs. Randle received 98 first-place votes from a panel of 100 sportswriters and broadcasters.

His son, Kyden, delivered

the award to Randle while his team was on the practice floor after he became the first Knicks player to win the Most Improved Player award. He wants to be the second, too.

Randle said his goal is to win the award again next season. He doesn't know if he could actually get it again, but he plans to make another improvement regardless of the recognition. □